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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001541

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: President meeting with JVP leads to much speculation; most observers see no lasting PA-JVP pact

Ref: Colombo 1450

(U) Classified by Ambassador E. Ashley Wills. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

¶11. (C) Summary: The President recently met with the JVP in what many saw as a move to thwart the UNF peace initiatives. PA representatives and other observers state the meetings between the President and JVP were simply a show of strength. The upcoming no confidence vote against a UNF Minister might be the first test of that strength. End Summary.

¶12. (U) On August 9, President Kumaratunga met with the leader of the radical Janantha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Tilvin Silva. The meeting elicited strong responses from Tamil politicians who described the talks as a threat to the peace process. MP G.G. Ponnambalam of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) stated that her meeting with the JVP proves that when the President "talks of building a pluralistic society it is merely lip service." According to him, working with the Sinhala-nationalist JVP shows that the President has no credibility. MP T. Thangavadivel summarized the TNA response when he said the PA and JVP working together is a "rotten alliance."

¶13. (U) Presidential Spokesman Harim Peiris countered by describing the meeting, and subsequent discussions, as simple political posturing in hopes of staving off possible snap elections (see Reftel). He asserted that the PA had no desire to coordinate policy with the JVP. A secondary reason for the meeting, he asserted, was to show the United National Front (UNF) that the President would not accede to their demands on a range of issues without a fight.

¶14. (C) Some political observers believe any agreement between the JVP and PA can only be of a limited nature, because of the adverse effects any such alliance would have within and on the PA. Kingsley Rodrigo, Executive Director of PAFFREL, a NGO promoting democratic reform, stated that a true alliance between Kumaratunga and Silva would result in a number of PA MPs' abandoning their party. Kethesh Loganathan of the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) believes that any joint efforts by the JVP and PA will be only for election purposes: too many people in the party do not trust the JVP. Loganathan emphasized that the single largest reason for the unwillingness of many PA MPs to work with JVP is that the electorate wants peace and the JVP has taken a strong anti-peace process stance.

¶15. (C) Referring to a possible alliance between the PA and JVP, General Secretary of the UNF Senarath Kapukotuwa claimed that the first test of any such relationship would be the PA-sponsored no confidence bill against Minister of Interior John Amarantunge. Kapukotuwa claimed that the Kumaratunga meeting with Silva was an attempt to show strength, but the reluctance of some PA members to speak against Amarantunge is the true indicator of the PA's weakness. Observers such as Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Executive Director of the CPA, agreed with the assessment that the events leading up to the vote on the no-confidence bill will give some indication of the strength of each side going into the debate over a constitutional amendment designed to limit the President's powers.

Wills